

# YOUR GUIDE TO EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

February 2021

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*Performance management made simple*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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3	Introduction
5	Purpose of performance management
10	“What” your performance management should cover
12	Objectives
13	Competencies
14	Values
14	Career progression and compensation
15	“How” your performance management should look
16	Ongoing feedback
17	Check-ins
18	Formal reviews
20	“Make it happen” – implementation plan
23	Key takeaways
24	Appendix

# INTRODUCTION

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Employee performance management has become more important than ever. While many forward-thinking organizations have invested heavily in technologies that support the modern workforce, many are still suffering from reduced employee productivity and engagement, due to the lack of education, tools, and culture support.

With the rapid acceleration of flexible working in 2020, there is more pressure on organizations to evolve their people strategies and workflows. Adapting talent

management strategies, evolving the employee experience further, and integrating technology in ways that will drive employee engagement are critical.

If you are reading this, you are likely a CEO, COO, or a talent leader looking to find a solution that truly develops, motivates, and engages your employees – anytime and anywhere. We wrote this guide to help you design your best-in-class performance management for your employees. We hope it's helpful.



# INTRODUCTION

This guidebook will cover performance management in four main sections:

- 1 Purpose of performance management
- 2 “*What*” your performance management should cover
- 3 “*How*” your performance management process should look like
- 4 “*Make it happen*” – implementation plan

## About Pavestep

Pavestep makes performance management simple and effective. We help you develop, motivate, and understand your talent – anytime and anywhere. Pavestep’s software and workshops enable continuous & 360 feedback, seamless goal alignment, and flexible performance reviews. Develop and motivate your talent with us.

 @Pavestep

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# Purpose of performance management

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*As long as people are clear on what they need to do and what's going on, you're very likely to succeed. When nobody is clear, then you're guaranteed to fail.*

Ben Horowitz



# PURPOSE OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

## Purpose of Performance Management

Performance management systems are critical for organizations, as they help: (i) align goals throughout the organization, (ii) develop employees, and (iii) motivate employees.

### 1. Goal Alignment

Alignment of goals between organizations and their employees is crucial. When there is a misalignment (and there often is), it is a lose-lose situation. Employees do not get rewarded for meeting their goals because they do not

contribute to the organization's goals. Organizations, of course, lose productivity and end up missing targets. In fact, one study compared samples of most and least financially successful corporations and found that 44% of the most successful corporations had their managerial goals almost completely aligned<sup>1</sup>. None of the least successful had such alignment. It's imperative to clearly define and communicate the objectives, competencies, and values that you want your employees to work towards.

*Effective performance management starts with goal alignment. Always.*

## Purpose of Performance Management



Goal  
Alignment



Employee  
Development



Employee  
Motivation



# PURPOSE OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

## 2. Employee Development

Skill development allows employees do their jobs efficiently, ensures that employees have the skills to support future business growth, and keeps them motivated. For many employees, skill development is the biggest driver of retention. Focusing on employee development also helps with recruiting – according to a survey by Jobvite, career growth opportunities are more important than salary for employees when they consider job offers<sup>2</sup>. Employee development is critical for both retention and recruitment.

## 3. Employee Motivation

Feedback and recognition act as strong motivators for employees. 69% of employees say they would work harder if their efforts were better recognized<sup>3</sup>. In addition, a recent survey found that 24% of workers would consider leaving their jobs if they have managers that provide inadequate performance feedback<sup>4</sup>. Performance management systems that promote meaningful feedback and recognition keep employees motivated and engaged.

*Teams that shared feedback had:*

**8.9%** *greater profitability*

**14.9%** *lower turnover rates*

**12.5%** *greater productivity*

*compared to teams that didn't have feedback<sup>5</sup>.*



# RETHINKING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management is fundamental to any high performing organization. Yet, most performance management systems are ineffective at developing and motivating employees. What once worked two decades ago does not work in today's workplaces. There are few key drivers that have created an urgent need to rethink performance management.

## 1. Changing workforce

The younger generation of Millennials and Generation Zs comprise over 35% of the workforce<sup>6</sup>. While all employees want feedback, these younger generations want more of it. Over 65% of the younger generations want multiple check-ins from their managers weekly, if not daily<sup>7</sup>. They want recognition for jobs well done, corrective feedback on what they need to improve, and transparency into their career paths – in real-time.

## 2. The emergence of the at-home workforce

Over the last two decades, there has been an upward trend for remote work<sup>8</sup>. With the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, this growth accelerated as most organizations were forced to transition their employees to remote work full-time. The quick switch to digital offices and the lack of the right infrastructure/tools resulted in organizations suffering from reduced employee productivity and engagement. With over two-thirds of organizations planning to permanently shift employees to remote work after the Covid-19 crisis ends<sup>9</sup>, implementing systems that keep the remote and in-office workforce engaged and productive is critical.

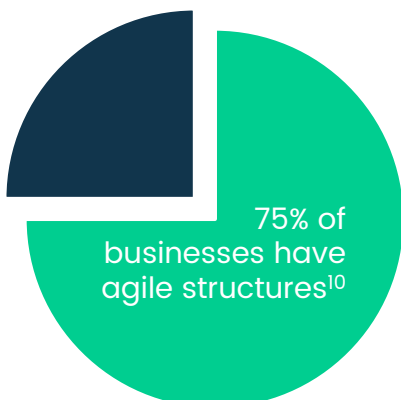




# RETHINKING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

## 3. Changing organization structures

Many companies no longer operate in the hierarchical structures that once worked decades ago. Employees are now working in multiple roles, across different teams/departments, with several managers throughout the year. We need agile performance management systems that match these agile networks of teams that organizations are now becoming. Imagine conducting an annual 360 review process for employees who have worked with six different managers on nine different teams – it just doesn't work.



## 4. Continuous is not enough

Continuous feedback has gained popularity in recent years, with many large companies, such as Adobe, Dell, Microsoft, and IBM replacing annual reviews with frequent, informal check-ins between managers and employees. While continuous feedback is a good start, it's important to remember that *feedback is a double-edged sword – poorly-delivered feedback is worse than no feedback*. All feedback should be constructive. In most companies, there isn't enough training or tools to help employees understand how to provide and receive constructive feedback. Constructive feedback is action-based, effort-based, and forward-looking. See Appendix 1 for more information.

*Industry Analyst Josh Bersin estimates that ~70% of multinational companies are moving away from annual reviews and toward regular performance conversations.*

# “What”

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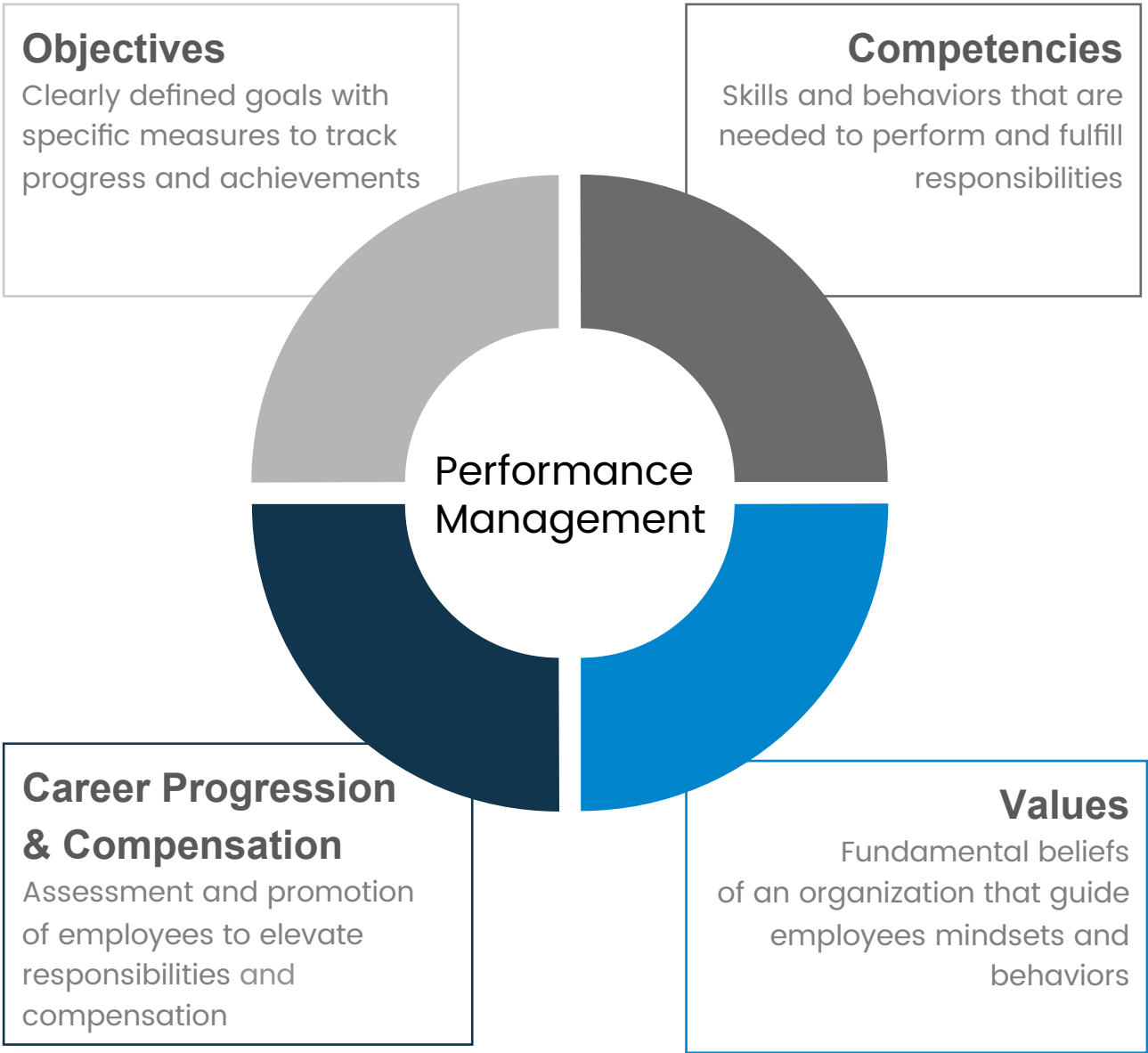
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*To win in the marketplace, you must first win in the workplace.*

Douglas Conant

# “WHAT” PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SHOULD COVER

There are four major elements that should be covered in performance management: objectives, competencies, values, and career progression/compensation.



# “WHAT” PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SHOULD COVER

## 1. Objectives

Objectives are clearly defined goals with specific measures used to track the progress. Objectives are paramount in engaging employees and ensuring that employees are “rowing in the same direction”. Two popular objective setting frameworks are Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and Objectives and Key Results (OKR).

- KPIs are metrics that evaluate how effectively an organization achieves its key business objectives
- OKRs have Objectives that are measured with a set of related metrics, called Key Results.

OKRs and KPIs are natural companions – *key results naturally encompass KPIs.*

When setting objectives, try to make sure they are as **S.M.A.R.T.** as possible:

- **Specific:** clear and concise
- **Measurable:** quantifiable
- **Achievable:** challenging yet attainable
- **Relevant:** appropriate given job responsibilities
- **Time-bound:** include milestones and target completion date

### Example 1:

Objective: Successfully launch version 5 of our main product

- Key Result: Get 100,000 new sign-ups
- Key Result: Achieve sign-up to trial rate of over 10%

### Example 2:

Objective: Increase website engagement by 70% in Q1

- Key Result: Get 5,000+ daily page views
- Key Result: Achieve 5,000+ new subscribers to newsletter



# “WHAT” PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SHOULD COVER

## OKR Cascading and Limitations

OKRs are often used to cascade organization objectives to teams, then further to individuals. This helps employees understand how they contribute to the overall organization and ensures that everyone is “rowing in the same direction”. While cascading OKRs throughout the organization can be powerful, there are some limitations and pitfalls that should be avoided.

First, if the organizations is so agile that it changes its goals frequently, cascading down OKRs all the way down to individual employees can become a significant exercise that ends up being counterproductive, as OKRs would need to be adjusted each time the goals are changed. This is common with early-stage startups.

Second, if individual employees’ responsibilities are inherently difficult to measure in the traditional S.M.A.R.T. way, organizations should be flexible, instead of forcing meaningless OKRs to their employees.

## 2. Competencies

Competencies are skills and behaviors that are needed to perform and fulfill one’s responsibilities and achieve objectives. Competencies are “how” and “why” employees achieve the results they achieve.

Building critical skills and competencies is the number one priority of HR leaders in 2021<sup>11</sup> – clearly defining competencies is imperative. For employees, they describe what is required to meet their objectives. For managers, they provide a foundation for dialogue on skill development with employees. For organizations, understanding their workforce’s competencies helps them identify strengths and weaknesses, which can be informative in shaping their future strategies. Examples of competencies can be found in Appendix 2.



# “WHAT” PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SHOULD COVER

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## 3. Values

Values are the fundamental beliefs of an organization. Unfortunately, research shows that employees are often disconnected to their organizations' values – Gallup reported that only 27% of U.S. employees strongly agree that they believe in their organizations' values<sup>12</sup>.

To incorporate your organization's values in your performance management process, you can start by (i) clearly defining your core values, (ii) aligning your core values with behaviors you expect from your employees, (iii) continuously monitoring employees' actions and behaviors, and (iv) providing effective feedback in a timely manner. Integrating values into your performance management process enables your employees to live and practice your values on a day-to-day basis. One tip on values – *make them as actionable as possible*.

## 4. Career Progression & Compensation

Most employees want to understand where they stand in their careers and what they need to do to achieve their career goals. Having regular conversations about your employees' career paths helps both you and the employees understand expectations.

Compensation can be a sensitive topic. Assigning values to employees' contributions is not easy, but it's a critical part of the compensation process. Industry salary ranges should be used to understand what competitors are offering. Some organizations make this information available for their employees for the purpose of transparency. Most importantly, the value the employee contributes to the organization and how compensation decisions are made should be clearly communicated.

# “How”

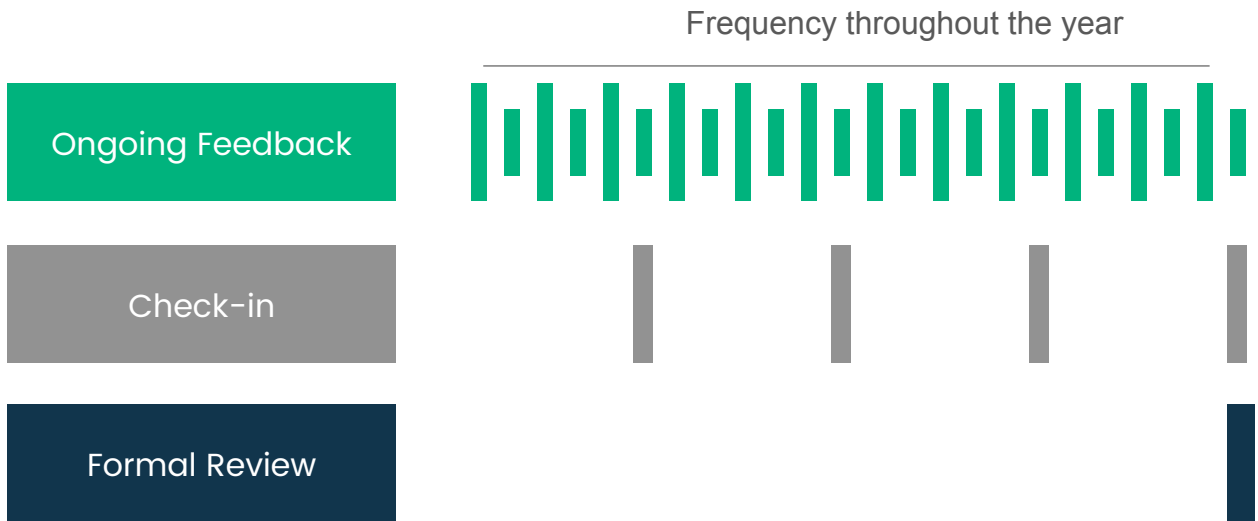
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*Make feedback normal. Not a performance review.*

Ed Batista

# “HOW” PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SHOULD LOOK



## 1. Ongoing feedback

Ongoing feedback about daily accomplishments and contributions can be a strong motivator for employees. While managers may avoid giving feedback due to fear of hurting an employee’s feelings, one study found that more than half of employees want corrective feedback over praise and recognition<sup>13</sup>. Ongoing feedback is essential to help build and sustain a culture of feedback. See Appendix 3 for more details.

**What is covered during ongoing feedback?** Feedback should focus on objectives, competencies, and values – recognizing great work

and correcting behaviors in real-time.

**Who is involved?** Ongoing feedback conversations should be between two employees (e.g., manager & employee or employee & peer).

**How and when should you provide ongoing feedback?** A basketball coach does not sit quietly until the end of the game. They try to correct issues as soon as possible, and they celebrate the team’s successes in real-time. Managers should too. Feedback should be constructive, objective, continuous, relevant, and direct. See Appendix 1 for more information.



# “HOW” PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SHOULD LOOK

## 2. Check-ins

### What is covered during check-ins?

Managers should revisit the feedback their employees received (in real-time) since the last check-in session.

**Who is involved?** Check-in sessions should be between managers and employees.

**How and when should you provide check-in sessions?** Check-ins should occur every 3–6 months. Prior to the check-in, encourage employees to conduct a self-assessment to help

prepare themselves. A time between the manager and employee should be scheduled ahead of time and both parties should be prepared. Notable accomplishments and progress in objectives, competencies, and values should be documented. If you are managing a remote workforce, prioritize face-to-face for check-ins.

We have included a checklist below for managers conducting check-ins below.

PRIOR TO MEETING	DURING THE MEETING	AFTER THE MEETING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Review employee’s objectives &amp; feedback on competencies and values</li><li>▪ Create an outline<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Prioritize important topics</li><li>○ Prepare specific examples</li></ul></li><li>▪ Prepare feedback – ensure it’s constructive and relevant</li><li>▪ Share the outline</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Use the outline as a guide for the discussion, but be flexible</li><li>▪ Do not rush the conversation</li><li>▪ Share observations</li><li>▪ Ask the employee what he/she sees and thinks</li><li>▪ Discuss next steps and set clear performance expectations</li><li>▪ Document the conversation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Schedule the next check-in session</li><li>▪ Establish a cadence of follow-ups on urgent issues, if any</li><li>▪ Talk to your supervisor or HR representative if the employee has performance issues that are not improving</li></ul>

# “HOW” PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SHOULD LOOK

## 3. Formal reviews

If ongoing feedback and check-ins have been occurring regularly, formal performance review should not be in any way surprising to employees. At the end of the day, reviews are just another type of check-in.

**What is covered during a formal review?** Objectives, competencies, values, career progression, compensation, and ratings (if applicable) should be addressed in the performance review. Compensation and ratings can be

discussed in separate meetings to help employees focus on the feedback.

**Who is involved?** Formal reviews are typically between managers and employees.

**How and when should you provide formal reviews?** These reviews should occur every 6–12 months. While reviews are like check-ins sessions, you can create a set of questions to guide the conversation in a more structured way. Similar to check-ins, prioritize face-to-face interaction for formal reviews in a remote workforce.

### Should 360 reviews be conducted?

360 reviews can help eliminate biases, creating a better picture of the employee’s competencies. 360 reviews can be conducted as part of the formal review process, but some organizations conduct 360 feedback throughout the year, especially in organizations with agile/matrix team structures. 360 reviews can also create a strong culture of feedback.

### Should self reviews be conducted?

Self reviews give employees the opportunity to reflect on their performance and their contributions. They also encourage employees to think about and plan for their short- and long-term goals with the organization.

# “HOW” PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SHOULD LOOK

## What about performance ratings?

Whether you should rate performance should ultimately depend on your organization's people strategy. There are four important questions that can help you determine whether you need any type of rating:

- What is your overall people strategy?
- Who is your target talent pool?
- What does your target talent pool care about?
- Do you need to differentiate progression or compensation in any way, based on the answers to the questions above?

Based on your answers, you may decide that you need some type of performance ratings. Here are some tactical tips you could consider:

- 1 Making ratings private so that only management and HR know individual employees' ratings.
- 2 Separating feedback and rating discussions to reduce the negative link between ratings and feedback conversations.
- 3 Defining ratings clearly and communicate them to the employees.
- 4 Calibrate performance ratings to improve the consistency, fairness, and accountability of performance ratings.

# “Make it happen”

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*I believe we are in the early days of a wholesale replacement of traditional talent management software, and these small vendors are inventing what's coming next.*

Josh Bersin



## Getting started

Implementation is key to any successful initiative. Implementing a successful performance management system will not happen overnight. It takes planning, stakeholder buy-in, and collective effort to make sure that the system sustains its impact over a long period of time.

If you are starting from scratch or moving from traditional performance management systems, here are the four steps you can consider.

- 1 Set up the foundation
- 2 Educate your workforce
- 3 Provide the right tools
- 4 Put the right processes in place

## 1. Set up the foundation

If your organization hasn't done so already, develop and codify your values, core competencies, and career progression/compensation plans. Objectives should be developed as a part of the overall

business planning.

## 2. Educate your workforce

Provide your workforce with training and resources to help them understand the importance of performance management, what effective feedback looks like (and how to share it), and how they can benefit from it. Start with this guidebook if it's appropriate. You can use our blog for more resources – [pavestep.com/blog](https://pavestep.com/blog). If you want in-person workshops from Pavestep, feel free to get in touch!

## 3. Provide the right tools

It's extremely important to document the feedback and conversations as they happen.

There are a lot of tools out there that you can use. Some organizations use the pen-and-paper approach. Some use shared documents like Google Sheets.

# IMPLEMENTATION

These simpler tools may suffice for small organizations with 15 or fewer employees. However, larger organizations can benefit from comprehensive performance management solutions.

Key benefits of comprehensive performance management solutions like Pavestep include:

- Easy goal management throughout the organization
- Effective feedback sharing using research-based design and analytics
- Single place to store all and analyze performance data to truly understand employees' strengths and weaknesses
- Reporting capabilities that streamline formal performance review processes
- Secure access control that ensures that employees only see what they should be allowed to see

Regardless of the tool used, you want to make sure that the tool is simple to ensure maximum adoption and usage.

## **4. Put the right processes in place**

Once you have established the foundation, educated your workforce, and provided the right tools, it's time to put processes in place to build and sustain culture of feedback.

Sharing feedback can be sensitive and difficult for employees, especially in the beginning. This is where managers must really step up their game if they want to see engagement and impact. Here are a few tactical examples:

- Lead by example. Ask your managers to start every staff meeting by spending five minutes on (i) what feedback they received last week, (ii) what they did to act on that feedback, and (iii) asking for new feedback. This helps employees see that it is totally acceptable to share feedback with one another.
- Hold managers accountable. Incorporate the number of feedback requests and check-in sessions into your managers' metrics.



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

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- 1 Effective performance management starts with goal alignment. Always.
- 2 Feedback is powerful for productivity, retention, and profitability.
- 3 Feedback is a double-edged sword. Continuous feedback isn't enough.
- 4 *"How"*: ongoing feedback, check-ins, and formal reviews.
- 5 *"What"*: objectives, competencies, values, and career progression & compensation.
- 6 *"Make it happen"*: set up the foundation, educate your workforce, provide the right tools, and put the right processes in place.

We hope this guidebook was helpful. Feel free to reach out to us if you have questions or feedback.



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# Appendix

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# APPENDIX 1: EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

## What is effective feedback?

Here, we outline some key points for delivering effective feedback.

### 1. Constructive

First and foremost, effective feedback is constructive. In our mind, constructive feedback means the following:

- Action-based, not trait-based.
- Effort-based, not result-based.
- Forward-looking, not just backwards.

#### 1A: Action-based

Action-based feedback focuses on specific actions, instead of traits that the receiver (seems to) portray (in your mind). When you focus your feedback on actions, it allows the receiver to understand what to do and what not to do next time. On the other hand, when you focus your feedback on traits, the receiver can't do much to change his/her traits. Also, people tend to get defensive when you comment on their traits.

Let's walk through a fun example.

When someone tells you “you look really good” – while it sounds pleasant, it is not constructive because it doesn't tell you how you can keep looking good. It's difficult to know what made you look good that day – was it the hair? The shoes? The shirt? On the other hand, if someone tells you “I like the way you did your hair today”. You know exactly what to do next time you want to look good. *Make it actionable!*

#### 1B: Effort-based

Effort-based feedback focuses on strategy, effort, or process that the receiver took. Typically, strategy, effort, and process are under people's control – you can choose your own strategy, put in more or less effort, or change processes. Results, on the other hand, are driven by many, many different variables – most of which are not under your control. Often times, there is a lot of luck involved. When you are providing feedback to develop your talent – make sure to focus on effort, not results.



# APPENDIX 1: EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

## 1C: Forward-looking

Feedback should always be forward-looking, not just backwards. Most people know when they are under-performing – they just don't know what to do or are too afraid to ask for help. When providing feedback, spend a few minutes and either provide actionable suggestions or brainstorm with the employee. It will save you time down the road and help you develop more meaningful relationships.

## 2. Objective

Effective feedback is objective (or as objective as it can be). People are biased, and it's impossible to be truly objective. However, there are certain things you can do to make feedback less objective:

- Make unconscious bias training mandatory for all employees
- Enable 360 feedback by default to identify potential blind spots
- Focus on actions and behaviors, not observed traits or intentions
- Document feedback in real-time

## 3. Continuous

Effective feedback is continuous. It happens in real-time, not just on December 31st. Continuous feedback can minimize recency bias, helps you celebrate accomplishments as they happen, and correct issues before they get out of hand.

## 4. Relevant

Effective feedback is relevant. Most employees have their own goals, objectives, and career paths that they care about. If you tie your feedback closely to these aspects of an employee's career, not only will the feedback be more relevant for them, they are more likely to listen.

## 5. Direct and kind

Two words: Radical Candor. Check out Radical Candor by Kim Scott. We call it being "direct and kind".



# APPENDIX 2: COMPETENCY EXAMPLES

COMPETENCY	BEHAVIORS
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sets clear directions and milestones for teams to follow.</li><li>• Prioritizes work streams and manages team’s time efficiently.</li><li>• Delegates and provides autonomy to right people at the right time.</li></ul>
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Goes above and beyond to help colleagues in need.</li><li>• Supports group decisions and puts team goals ahead of own goals.</li><li>• Accepts compromise.</li></ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Simplifies complicated concepts and communicates them clearly.</li><li>• Listens actively.</li><li>• Debates in a structured manner.</li></ul>
Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Takes ownership of his/her own objectives and performance.</li><li>• Completes tasks in a timely and consistent manner.</li></ul>
Problem-solving and analytical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identifies a problem, finds the root cause, and structures logical solutions based on data.</li><li>• Holds high standards of intellectual honesty.</li><li>• Demonstrates attention to detail.</li></ul>
Adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adapts to changing work environments, priorities, and organizational needs.</li><li>• Responds to change with a positive attitude and willingness to learn.</li></ul>
Interpersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creates personal relationships with others through common ground.</li><li>• Reads room/relationship dynamics and manages interactions appropriately.</li></ul>
Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plans and organizes tasks effectively to achieve objectives.</li><li>• Allocates and uses resources properly.</li></ul>



# APPENDIX 3: CULTURE OF FEEDBACK

A culture of feedback is a culture where every employee feels that they can share feedback with another person in the organization – *regardless of role*.

There are many benefits to building a culture of feedback.

## 1. Motivates employees

Employees want recognition for completed tasks, corrective feedback on what they need to improve, and transparency into their career paths – in real-time. One survey found that employees would work harder if they felt that their efforts were better recognized<sup>4</sup>. Building a culture of feedback and recognition is a cost effective way to motivate and engage employees.

## 2. Generates employee performance data

Feedback is data. If feedback is occurring 24 times a year, those 24 performance data points can be used to help guide training and talent decisions. Simply put, feedback is extremely useful talent data.

## 3. Builds better work relationships

Having frequent conversations with employees help create meaningful workplace relationships. This becomes more critical in the remote workforce, where communication is often one of the biggest challenges<sup>14</sup>. Setting up protocols and systems to share feedback helps create a channel for communication and can ensure that employees feel motivated, developed, and engaged.

## 4. Saves organizations time and money

The average manager spends about 210 hours a year on activities related to reviews<sup>15</sup>. Supplementing your formal review with continuous & real-time feedback helps ease the pressure on the annual review. Documenting these conversations in one place can help streamline feedback check-ins and the formal performance review.

## APPENDIX 4: PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLANS

A performance improvement plan (PIP) is typically a formal plan that outlines an employee's performance issues and steps to fix/mitigate those issues. They are mainly designed for two purposes: (i) improving employees' performance or (ii) documenting issues to protect the business (e.g., from accusations of unlawful termination).

They are usually used as the "last resort" in addressing employee performance before termination. While there are advantages to PIPs, they are not easy to get right.

*Our view is that unless there are*

*other factors at play, forget the PIPs. Foster the culture of constructive and continuous feedback and create a process to document the feedback in one place. If your employees are sharing feedback with each other regularly, issues are being brought up to the surface in real-time. They are getting suggestions on how to improve – exactly what PIPs are meant to do, but without the stigma, especially because everyone is receiving feedback in real-time, not just the under-performers. If you are set on creating PIPs, make sure that your managers are trained on what it is and isn't.*

### Advantages

- They create a formal process and a document in which the employee receives guidance.
- They act as clear “warnings” for employees to pick up their performance – conversations are sometimes just not enough.
- They act as a formal document that outlines issues, which can be used to reduce risk of litigation in the event of terminations.

### Disadvantages

- Managers often view PIPs as a prerequisite to termination and nothing more.
- Employees often treat PIPs as a trigger to start looking for jobs.
- PIPs are typically documented in employees' files and could be potentially damaging for future progression of the employee, despite the employee completing the PIP successfully.



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